



CJTF Phoenix makes history with 11B Infantry course

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KABUL, Afghanistan—In a historic ceremony held at Camp Phoenix, 35 Soldiers officially became Infantrymen.

The Soldiers, all from Coalition Joint Task Force Phoenix, were awarded the Infantry military occupational specialty upon graduating from only the second Infantry qualification course held in a combat zone; the first was during World War II.

Task Force Phoenix, which trains the Afghan National Army, offered the two-week course for its Soldiers from the Indiana National Guard's 76th Infantry Brigade. The graduates each hold a different primary MOS but now have 11B, Infantry, as a secondary MOS.

National Guard Soldiers usually earn their Infantry MOS at a Regional Military Academy in the United States, explained U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. James Gordon, Task Force Phoenix's senior enlisted Soldier.

When U.S. Army Master Sgt. James O'Connor and U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class James Moffat learned that an Infantry MOS qualification course would be offered, they immediately volunteered to instruct. Both are members of the California National Guard's 223rd Infantry Regiment and have six years experience instructing the course at their home unit.

Conducted at Camp Phoenix and at the ANA's Kabul Military Train-



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt 1st Class Mark Cutler

Soldiers from Task Force Phoenix practice tactical urban movements during training at the Kabul Military Training Center. The students were the first to graduate from an infantry qualification course in a combat zone since World War II.

ing Center, the two-week course showed that training in a combat zone can present many challenges.

"In the States, if we (the instructors) need anything for the course, we just jump in a vehicle and drive to the supply room or to headquarters and get it. Here we have an entirely different scenario," said Moffat.

Other unique challenges included the constant possibility of improvised explosive devices on the roads, civilians on the training ranges, the use of live ammunition at all times and the requirement to maintain appropriate force protection levels.

One unforeseen training challenge involved the use of individual body armor. IBA is issued to all deployed Soldiers, but the equipment is not always readily available in U.S. training environments. Here, the Soldiers had to wear their IBA due

to force protection requirements, making simple tasks such as donning a rucksack and maneuvering more difficult. The extra weight of the IBA, about 25 pounds, added stress and fatigue and also compounded the risk of heat casualties during training.

Training in a combat zone, however, provided the instructors with many valuable advantages not otherwise available at a stateside training site.

"We can simulate many scenarios in a schoolhouse environment, but knowing that the possibility exists that someone out there might try to harm you and that gunfire can reach your patrol base puts a very real sense of urgency and importance to each of the tasks taught," O'Connor said. "Even after the long days, you really didn't have to worry about the guys falling asleep while on perim-



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Mark Cutler

(Above) Task Force Phoenix Soldiers take an objective during Infantry MOSQ training. Only 35 of the 46 Soldiers who began the training completed the rigorous course.

eter watch.”

The students traveled by tactical convoy to and from their training. This was not part of the course’s program of instruction, but a necessity due to enemy threat conditions.

O’Connor and Moffat believe the students benefited from the realistic training environment.

Not only did they get an opportunity to train in the weather conditions, terrain and civilian population of today’s battlefield, they received the added benefit of training with weapon systems not available to students in the U.S.

“The students were able to fire AK-47s and PKMs (machine guns)

with actual rounds. Who in the States gets to do that?” Moffat said.

The instructors ensured training and doctrine standards were maintained throughout the course. While 46 Soldiers began the training, only 35 graduates successfully completed all of the course requirements to standard.

Sgt. Joe McFarren was named the course’s Honor Graduate and Spc. Matt Estheiner received the Commandant’s Award for academic success.

The Infantry course is difficult and physically demanding no mat-

(Below) U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class James Moffat instructs U.S. Army Infantry students at the Kabul Military Training Center. Task Force Phoenix conducted the two-week Infantry Military Occupational Specialty qualification course.



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Mark Cutler

ter where it is taught, and conducting the course with actual “go to war” equipment and under hostile conditions benefited the instructors as much as the Soldiers.

“This has been the most challenging course I have worked on. We have learned many lessons that are going to benefit the Soldiers we train when we get back to California. We have identified possible pitfalls that we might otherwise have overlooked,” O’Connor said. “This experience has been very positive.” 🇦🇫



Photo by U.S. Army Maj. Eric Bloom

Soldiers of the 76th Infantry Brigade graduate from the first Infantry qualification course conducted in a combat zone since World War II. The graduation ceremony was held at Camp Phoenix.

